

GUARDING AGAINST CRIME BY GRADING MENTAL DEFECTIVES

EVERY now and again the community is stirred by the commission of some atrocious crime. For a time everybody is talking about it, the newspapers devote columns to details, much speculation prevails concerning possible motive and suggestions are rife that the crime must be the product of an insane or feeble mind. Soon, however, a new momentous event—possibly another crime—holds the attention, and after a while the first is overshadowed and finally is forgotten. In such wise does the history of crime repeat itself.

The ability to forget is a valuable mental asset, and we would be in a sorry state of confusion were we unable to suppress and adjust disagreeable thoughts and experiences. In fact this power or function is a distinct funda-

City's "Clearing House," Established at Post-Graduate Hospital, Has Examined More Than 4,000 Cases in Two Years—Different Tests Employed

can and should prepare against the spread of crime.

It is only a few years ago that the idea of suspecting criminals as being of defective mentality was considered quite fantastic. But thanks to sober consideration and scientific investigation, it has become an established fact that much if not all of the criminality about us is due to nervous instability, insanity and feeble-mindedness. The

The clinic is open daily from 9 A. M. to 1 P. M. Each patient is first examined by a trained psychologist who uses the Binet-Simon scale of intelligence, which will be referred to later, and after that the patient is turned over to one of the doctors, who takes a complete history from the mother and other relatives, following this by a thorough physical, neurological and mental examination. Should the infor-

are asked for and welcomed. The complete history, including the mental tests and notes on subsequent visits, is type-written and kept on file.

The history is taken in great detail and begins with the "chief complaint" or the reason why the case is sent to the Clearing House and who accompanies to give the facts. Then the "family history" is taken and this embraces that of the patient's parents, that of the paternal and maternal grandparents, with special reference to any history of insanity, nervous diseases, epilepsy, neuropathic taint, tuberculosis, alcoholism or criminality, likewise an inquiry into the brightness and normality of the patient's cousins. A complete list of the brothers and sisters follows, how old they are, what they work at, what their earning capacities are, or which schools they attend and what grades they are in. Then comes the "personal history" and among the questions asked are the following: Conditions attending birth, age at which walked and talked, defect symptoms during infancy, entering of childhood, convulsions, are on diseases of school, educability, tractability, emotional tone, peculiarities of behavior, association with other children, waywardness, vices, sleep, appetite, complaints, &c. Following, the patient is often interviewed privately, other mental tests and a complete physical examination are made and then the diagnosis and prognosis formulated with advice as to treatment, supervision, &c.

Many cases are treated from the clinic for indefinite periods, others are sent to the New York city children's hospitals and school on Randall's Island, where there are 2,500 patients, or to up-State institutions. Among the latter are the Newark State Custodial Asylum for Feeble-Minded Women, where the moral and mental defectives remain during the child bearing period of their lives; that at Syracuse for the teachable cases; that at Rome for the unteachable, the Craig colony for epileptics at Sonoma and Letchworth Village, near Haverstraw. Besides these institutions patients are also sent to other smaller homes which are supported by charitable contribution.

The Binet-Simon test consists of a series of four or five questions listed under the ages 3 to 12. For example, a normal six-year-old child should be able to tell whether it is morning or afternoon; to define a fork, table, chair and horse; to put a bunch of keys on a designated chair, shut a designated door and lastly bring a designated box to the examiner; to indicate his right hand and point to his left ear, and to choose



Basket weaving keeps the boys busy.

mental of human makeup, and whenever the mind can no longer adapt itself successfully to the ever changing environment which presents itself—that of the outside world plus that of its inner self—a mental malady of one type or another will result. The mind strives to be content, and this is accomplished by the various faculties functioning in accord. An unpleasant recollection tends to disturb this accord, and so it is pushed out of the mind—in other words, suppressed. However, not everything that is suppressed is disposed of permanently for the ultimate good of the organism. The mind is relieved temporarily, to be sure, but frequently the load that has been removed, through the very neglect accorded it by suppression grows in magnitude and force and later develops into a symptom of disease.

The body politic is much like a single, huge mind, and for confirmation, one needs but observe mob psychology, where hundreds of individuals will act as one man. We are shocked, we talk and we forget, only to repeat the performance another and still other times. Recently it has been the rumormongers that have held the public attention, and although the incident was closed but two weeks ago we seldom hear it mentioned now. As soon as a certain trial, pending at present, is brought into court interest will again be revived—and so it goes on.

This brings me to the point I wish to make, namely, that by merely attending with hectic emotionalism to the many crimes committed for the time being only, then promptly forgetting them, we are nourishing a cancer which has already reacted upon us and which, like a boomerang, will react in the future with even more telling



Types of feeble minded—From left to right: A normal child, Cretin aged 42, imbecile aged 32, a hydrocephalic, a Cretin, a Mongolian idiot, and a microcephalic.



Feeble minded children occupied in fancy work.

force. Individuals are taught to profit by their experiences. Why then does not this great city and State do likewise?

Medicine is gradually evolving a new principle, community treatment instead of isolated individual attention, and no longer are we content to wait until disease knocks at the door before attacking it, but we deliberately take precaution that it never shall appear. Prevention, however, must develop secondarily, for we cannot guard against everything the existence of which we are ignorant of, but what we can do is to act by experience and avert danger when by comparatively few ex-

next step, since we have insight into what confronts us, and understanding, need no longer fear, is to take advantage of what we know to protect ourselves.

A splendid start was made in this direction about two years ago, when, due to the indefatigable efforts of Dr. Max G. Schlapp, the so-called "clearing house" for mental defectives was established at the New York Post-Graduate Hospital and Medical School under the auspices of the Department of Public Charities and the commission of Michael J. Drummond. In that short time over 4,000 new cases have been examined, and over 147 agencies have

mation concerning the patient be inaccurate, contradictory or otherwise unreliable letters are written to the institution or school which he attends or in which he may have been, and in each case a graduate nurse is sent to the home who makes a complete and independent report of the environment which she finds. A diagnosis or judgment is never given haphazardly or carelessly and if necessary repeated examinations are made and the patient is kept under observation for considerable periods. Whenever the case is sent by the Children's Court, public schools, charitable organizations, or whatever, a report is sent to that agency and further correspondence and cooperation

One might say without exaggeration that every feeble minded person is a potential criminal, and when one stops to consider that mental deficiency varies from the slightest degree of abnormality, which often almost baffles detection, down to the stunted drivelling idiot, who practically leads no more than a vegetative existence, one can

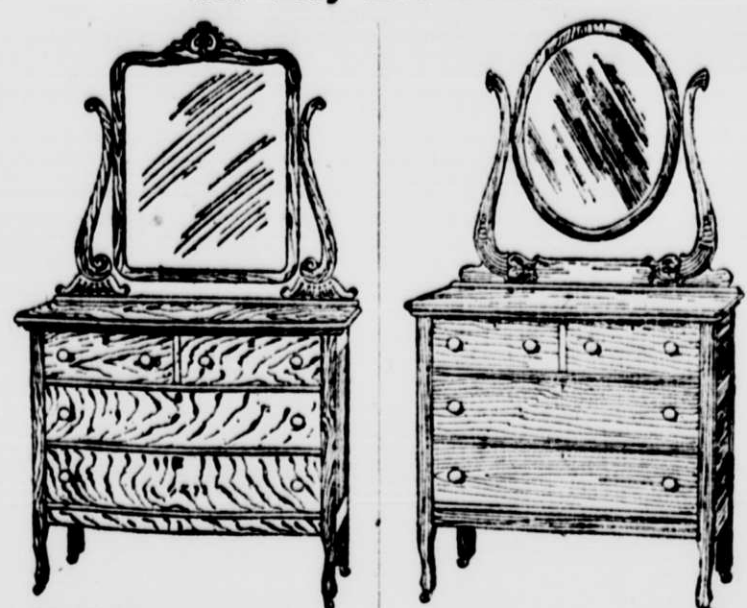
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